4-H Clover Clinic Allows Youth to Explore New “Sparks”

For more than three decades, 4-H Clover Clinic has been a wintertime staple. Each February, current 4-H members and new to 4-H youth alike gather for a day full of engaging workshops at Illinois Central College in East Peoria. The University of Illinois Extension staff serving Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell Counties coordinated this year’s 34 workshops to include a focus on creative arts, engineering, different cultures, and environmental awareness.

This wide range of workshop topics is strategic. The variety of opportunities is purposefully cultivated to provide new experiences. Prior to attending Clover Clinic, youth are provided with descriptions of the classes offered, and choose the workshops they find most interesting. Emily Schoenfelder, 4-H youth development educator explained, “Our hope is that kids find a ‘spark’ at Clover Clinic. A spark can be anything that a young person has a passion for. It might be a special talent they have or a topic that they’re really interested in. It could be anything!” She continued by describing the reasoning for this, stating, “Research has shown that if youth know what their ‘spark’ is, and if they have caring adults who support that, they’re more likely to volunteer, have higher grades, just to be more successful overall.”

More than 200 youth from throughout Central Illinois were in attendance, including 30 teens plus 50 adults taking on leadership roles as instructors, assistants, and mentors.

There are tremendous benefits to this program. Youth can meet new people and make new friends from all over the area. They can gain independence and college readiness from the chance to navigate a college campus. One Clover Clinic parent touted the experience, calling it a, “fun and positive environment. [We] love the location because my kids feel special getting to go to a college campus.”

However, the most important benefit of Clover Clinic may be the opportunity for young people to try new things. This year, kids had the opportunity to arrange flowers, dissect rodents, make Chinese dumplings, engineer electronic inch worms, design and create vinyl stickers, do chemistry experiments, learn ballroom dancing, try filmmaking, make a batch of bread from scratch, and much more. Participating families valued this chance. When asked about the greatest benefit of the day, another parent exclaimed, “My daughter loved Clover Clinic! She got to experience things she had never done before.”